2:Gough E-4, 5 (1947-1949)1961 A Wil Kerala A Wil
Central Kerala Nayar

A husband normally visited his wife after eating supper in his natal home, and left before breakfast. Even today in many orthodox Nayar homes men eat regularly in their taravāds and accept food in their wives' homes only on special invitation from their wives' kāranavans. Traditionally a husband placed his weapons outside his wife's door as a sign to other men that he was within. My informants in a Cochin village reported that, within living memory in the late nineteenth century, if two husbands called on the same night the one who came last might sleep outside on the veranda. Usually a woman's regular husbands knew each other and informally agreed upon their turns.

The relationship with the visiting husband was called *sambandham* (Sanskrit, "joining together"). At the start of a girl's first sambandham her husband came to her house privately at night, sometimes with a few friends of his own age. In the presence of the girl's kin he presented her with a white cloth of the kind worn as a skirt. The occasion was not marked by feasting. Later husbands might or might not present the cloth. A transient visitor is said to have left a gold coin beneath the woman's pillow, and a regular husband might do the same on the first night of his union.

While his relationship lasted, a regular husband was expected to make gifts to his wife at the three main festivals of the year. Vishu, in April, was the Malayalam New Year; Onam, in September, was a harvest festival; Tiruvadira, in December, was a women's festival to Kama Devan, the god of passion. The gifts were of bathing oil, bananas, wafer biscuits, and betel leaves and areca nuts for chewing. In some areas a husband also gave a loin cloth of superior quality at Onam. The gifts were prepared by women of the husband's taravād, and he should present them in person to each of his wives on the festival day. If a husband failed to make these gifts it was a tacit sign that he had ended the relationship. It should be noted that the gifts, trivial in value, were gifts of courtship and were in no sense maintenance. Bathing oil is a feminine toilet requisite; wafer biscuits are delicacies served at feasts; and the giving of chewing materials between a man and a woman is everywhere in South India associated with courtship or with the first night of marriage. A husband had no obligation at all to maintain his wife, for she received her food, shelter, and regular clothing from her taravād.

The only other obligations of a husband came at the birth of a child. When a woman became pregnant it was necessary for one or more men of appropriate caste to acknowledge possible biological

585 arecanuts and tobacco, to be given to the bride's house-
564 hold, and which are distributed to the guests. When the
613 bride's house is far away the bridegroom makes his pro-
cession thither from a neighbouring house. Arrived at
[276] the bride's house they sit a while and are again serv-
ed with food, after which they are conducted to a room
where betel and other chewing stuff is placed on brass
or silver plates (called thâlam). The chewing over,
sweetmeats are served, and then all go to the bridal
chamber, where the women of the house and others are
assembled with the bride, who, overcome with shyness,
hides herself behind the others. Here again the bride-
groom and his party go through more chewing while
they chat with the women. After a while the men with-
draw, wishing the couple all happiness; and then the
women, departing one by one leave the couple alone, one
of them shutting the door from the outside.

[431] "The Patter Brâhmans always collect on these occa-
sions and receive small presents (dakshina) of 2 to 4 annas
each, with betel leaf and areca nut from the bridegroom,
sometimes from the bride. A few who are invited
receive their dakshina in the bridal chamber; the others
[513] outside. [In a Nâyar house the sleeping rooms of the
[574] men and women are separate; at different ends of the
house.] Those of the bridegroom's party who live far
away are given sleeping accommodation at the bride's
house, with the men. About daybreak next morning the
bridegroom leaves the house with his party, leaving
under his pillow Rs. 8, 16, 32 or 64, according to his means
but never more than 64, which are intended to cover the
expenses of the wife's household on the ceremony. The
Sambandham is now complete. The girl remains in her
own Taravâd house, and her husband visits her there,
585 coming in the evening and leaving the next morning. A
564 few days after completion of the ceremony the senior
613 woman of the bridegroom's house sends some cloths,
602 including pavu mundu (superior cloths) and thorthu
mundu (towels) and some oil to the bride for her use for
[431] six months. Every six months she does the same, and
[796] on festivals of the Ônam, Vishu; Thiruvathira she sends
besides a little money, areca nut, betel nut and tobacco.
The money sent should amount to Rs. 4, or 8, or 16, or 32,
or 64; either one of these sums. Sums of the higher
numbers are very rarely sent.

"Before long the women of the husband's house express a longing for the girl-wife to be brought to their house, for they have not seen her yet. Again the

13:Thurston & Rangachari E-4, 5 (no date) 1909
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however, my experience that sambandham was rare on the side of the man before twenty-seven." "The Karanavan," Mr. Râman Menon writes, "and the women of his household choose the bride, and communicate their choice to the intending bridegroom through a third party; they may not, dare not speak personally to him in the matter. He approves. The bride's people are informally consulted, and, if they agree, the astrologer is sent for, and examines the horoscopes of both parties to the intended union. As a matter of course these are found to agree, and the astrologer fixes a day for the sambandham ceremony. A few days before this takes place, two or three women of the bridegroom's house visit the bride, intimating beforehand that they are coming. There they are well treated with food and sweetmeats, and, when on the point of leaving, they inform the senior female that the bridegroom (naming him) wishes to have sambandham with . . . . (naming her), and such and such a day is auspicious for the ceremony. The proposal is accepted with pleasure, and the party from the bridegroom's house returns home. Preparations for feasting are made in the house of the bride, as well as in that of the bridegroom on the appointed day. To the former all relations are invited for the evening, and to the latter a few friends who are much of the same age as the bridegroom are invited to partake of food at 7 or 8 P.M., and accompany him to the bride's house. After eating they escort him, servants carrying betel leaves (one or two hundred according to the means of the taravad), areca nuts and tobacco, to be given to the bride's household, and which are distributed to the guests. When the bride's house is far away, the bridegroom makes his procession thither from a neighbouring house. Arrived at the bride's house, they sit awhile, and are again

585 served with food, after which they are conducted to a
574 room, where betel and other chewing stuff is placed on
[276] brass or silver plates called thālam. The chewing over, sweetmeats are served, and then all go to the bridal chamber, where the women of the house and others are assembled with the bride, who, overcome with shyness,
585 hides herself behind the others. Here again the bridegroom and his party go through more chewing, while they chat with the women. After a while the men withdraw, wishing the couple all happiness, and then the women, departing one by one, leave the couple alone, one of
[431] them shutting the door from the outside. The Pattar Brāhmans always collect on these occasions, and receive small presents (dakshina) of two to four annas each, with betel leaves and areca nuts from the bridegroom, and sometimes from the bride. A few who are invited receive their dakshina in the bridal chamber, the others outside.
[513] Those of the bridegroom's party who live far away are given sleeping accommodation at the bride's house [in a Nāyar house the sleeping rooms of the men and women are at different ends of the house]. About daybreak next morning the bridegroom leaves the house with his party, leaving under his pillow 8, 16, 32, or 64 rupees, according to his means, which are intended to cover the expenses of the wife's household in connection with the ceremony. The sambandham is now complete.
[591] The girl remains in her own taravad house, and her
[613] husband visits her there, coming in the evening and
[431] leaving next morning. A few days after the com-
[796] pletion of the ceremony, the senior woman of the bridegroom's house sends some cloths, including pavu mundu (superior cloths) and thorthu mundu (towels), and some oil to the bride for her use for six months. Every six months she does the same, and, at the Ōnam,

796 themselves in the neatest and grandest possible attire. [302] They also darken the fringes of their eyelids with a sticky preparation of soot mixed up with a little oil or ghee, and sometimes with a superficial coating of [276] antimony powder. They also wear white, black, or red marks down the middle of their foreheads. They also chew betel, and thus redden their mouths and lips. [526] They then proceed to the enjoyment of another prominent item of pleasure, viz., swinging to and fro on what is usually known as an uzhinjal, or swing made [262] of bamboo. On the festival day, after the morning bath is over, they take a light meal, and in the noon the family dinner is voraciously attacked, the essential and almost universal ingredients being ordinary ripe plantain fruits, and a delicious preparation of arrowroot powder purified and mixed with jaggery (crude sugar) or sugar, and also cocoanut. Then, till evening, dancing and [593] merry-making are ceaselessly indulged in. The husband population are inexcusably required to be present in the wives' houses before evening, as they are bound to do on [586] the Ōnam and Vishu occasions. Failure to do this is looked upon as a step, or rather the first step, on the part of the defaulting husband towards a final separa- [132] tion or divorce from the wife. Despite the rigour of the bleak December season during which the festival commonly falls, heightened inevitably by the constant blowing of the cold east wind upon their moistened frames, these lusty maidens derive considerable pleasure from their early baths, and their frolics in the water. The biting cold of the season, which makes their persons shiver and quiver, becomes to them in the midst of all their ecstatic frolics an additional source of pleasure. The two items described above, viz., the swinging and beating of the water, have each their own distinctive

31: Slater S-5 (1916-1917) 1918 AWI India
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so long as they live, they have to keep their body and soul together. Thus year by year, the rich become richer and the poor poorer. The process is continuing at a fast rate and the people do not realize it. They are too ignorant and attribute everything to their fate and God's will. To add to these evils, in some years crops fail and there will be utter starvation. Thus the causes of indebtedness are— 511 426

(1) High rent.
(2) Population beyond means of subsistence.
(3) Lands limited in area.
(4) Absolute dependence on land of the population.

There is no instance of debtors who have entirely liberated themselves from debt in this desam. There is no co-operative society.

Sanitation.—In regard to sanitation, thanks to the peculiar customs of Malabar, the evils arising from the rigour of social rules are absent. Infant marriage and purdah are both absent. There is no problem of the disposal of night-soil here, for there are large unoccupied areas whither the people resort, while the women have latrines far out in their back compounds. As for insanitary habits, they are not addicted to any similar to what are found elsewhere. All bathe once a day in tanks or streams. There is neither much smoking or snuffing, but there is chewing (betel and tobacco and lime and arecanut all together) among all people, but not to such an extent as among people in Madras, etc. Drinking is a real evil among the Cherumas, but this is chiefly due to lack of proper food of other sorts. Several of them when asked why they drink have given the same unanimous answer, that "while stomach calls, one must respond, else not hear at all." The latter is of course the cheaper course. 364 [514] [515] 276 273

Good and clear water for drinking is easily got from private wells.

But with all these, the figure for the year of deaths from diseases and infant mortality is not encouraging. 165

The list contains the account of only one year that of 1915-16. But it still speaks for itself.

Kothachira.

Ages of dead.	Number according to age.	Fever.	Dysentery.	Tuberculosis.	Diarrhœa.	Dyspepsia.	Hysteria.	Karappani (skin blotched).	Other causes.
Lifeless birth	7	...	...	...	...	...	...	...	...
Below 1	9	...	3	...	...	...	4	2	...
Between 1 and 10 ...	13	4	3	1	...	...	4	1	...
„ 10 „ 20 ...	1	1	...	..	...	...	...	...	...
„ 20 „ 30 ...	7	3	...	1	1	...	...	...	2
„ 30 „ 40 ...	3	3	...	...	...	...	...	...	...
„ 40 „ 50 ...	...	...	...	...	...	...	...	...	...
„ 50 „ 60 ...	3	.	1	1	1	...	...	...	...
„ 60 „ 80 ...	5	...	1	1	1	...	...	...	2
Total ...	48	11	8	4	3	...	8	3	4

31: Slater S-5 (1916-1917) 1918 AWI India
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323 would be better paid. Some of these potters are employed by tile works producing pottery and glazed earthenware and are there paid Rs. 10 or so a month.

322 *Carpenters.*—There are five families of carpenters. There is steady demand for their labour, which is well paid. The occupation is hereditary and confined to the caste of 'Asaris', as they are called, a division of the Thiyyas. Full time is spent on the craft, which follows very old traditions. Earnings average about 6 annas a day. The carpenters go out to other villages for work.

324 *Goldsmiths, blacksmiths.*—Two or three families of each combine their traditionary crafts with agriculture, and are better off than most other low caste families. In the agricultural seasons they work morning and evening in the fields; and only at noon at their crafts. So they earn wages in money and in kind. The goldsmith earns Rs. 8 to Rs. 10 in this way per month; the blacksmith Rs. 5 to Rs. 10.

325 *Moulders.*—There is one family making vessels of bell-metal for all sorts of uses—domestic utensils, temple bells, etc. They are very skilled workers and well paid, owing to the great demand for their productions. Some cups, bowls, etc., made by these are very beautiful and exquisitely designed and polished. Earnings Rs. 10 to Rs. 15 per month, according to state of business.

285 *Basket-makers.*—Baskets, mats, etc., are made out of the bamboo by the Pariahs. Very useful, but cheap. Only a local market and mostly made to order, as most business is in the village. Only spare time is spent in this occupation; it is miserably ill paid owing to weakness in bargaining. There is scope for development.

293 *Umbrella makers.*—Umbrella making is the hereditary occupation of the Panans. The umbrellas are made of palm leaves and bamboo, and much used in the village. Until recently imported umbrellas were not seen. The indigenous article costs only a few coppers and gives better protection against rain, but is unwieldy. The earnings of the Panans from this source are very low, and they are now taking to agricultural labour.

[262] *The Chettis* make what are called *Pappatams*—the thin cakes to be fried in oil, for which Malabar is famous. The Chettis are also cartmen and take goods and passengers to neighbouring

• [276] places. The *Paravans* make slaked lime for chewing. About half the adults chew a mixture of betel, areca, and slaked lime.

438 *Village trade.*—The village buys every year agricultural implements such as ploughs, spades, levelling boards, harrows, *kuzhi kutti*. Most of these are made to order by the village craftsmen. Some are bought at neighbouring fairs. Seed is usually preserved by the cultivator out of his produce, but sometimes he is forced by poverty to consume it and then borrows it or buys it with borrowed money. Live stock is bought at the weekly fair of the neighbouring village of Vaniamkulam.

The villagers buy the articles of ordinary consumption like salt, sugar, kerosene oil, gingelly and coconut oil, as well as the various grains and pulses at the village shop. Sugar is a luxury to all but the richest villagers. More than Rs. 600 worth of toddy is sold in the village, the Cherumas, Pariahs and Panans being the chief consumers. They pay in paddy, out of their wages. Clothing is bought at neighbouring fairs or in the nearest trading centre.

31: Slater S-5 (1916-1917) 1918 AWI India
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423 are sublet to the actual cultivators, who are a rack-rented peasantry. The Kanom tenant, even when he does not himself cultivate the
435 land, gets a higher return than the janmi on his capital; this is probably due to the insecurity of his tenure and his assumption of risks in relation to the actual cultivators. The renewal fees are heavy and many people contract debt to pay them. Some unscrupulous janmis or their agents arbitrarily enhance the rents payable by the Kanomdar and turn him out if he refuses to pay. The principal landlord of this village does not belong to this class.

796 The village spends between Rs. 150 and Rs. 200 annually on religious festivals. This is the common expenditure and is raised by subscription. It excludes small individual expenditures.

The village temple was built many years ago. No new one has been built.

164 *Sanitary condition.*—Malaria is unknown, but other fevers are occasionally seen. Cholera visits the village at rare intervals. Plague is unknown. Tuberculosis may be rarely met with. Small-pox also visits the village at rare intervals. From 125 to 150 out of every 1,000 children born die in their first year. Thus in 1915 while 81 children were born 10 died before completing one year. This is the figure given in the village register. It needs some correction and the figures should be slightly higher. The rate of infantile mortality varies with the seasons, etc. A few cases of snake-bites are recorded, but fatality owing to this cause is not high. I hear that sometimes the Hon'ble Moopil Nayar of Kavalappara (our representative in the Legislative Council) gives free medical help in such cases.

759 No reliable medical assistance of an effective kind is available. There are no English doctors in or near the village and few could afford to pay their fees even if they did exist. There are one or two ayurvedic physicians, whom one should more correctly call quacks.* They have no scientific knowledge and cannot properly diagnose. They take advantage of the simple credulity and superstition of the ignorant villagers and give an air of mystery to their art by the practice of superstitious rites akin to witchcraft. I believe there is much preventible disease in the village. Some remedy is badly needed. It would be a useful reform that the village officers and the village schoolmasters should know something of medicine, hygiene, and sanitation. Then they could at least instruct the villagers as to what ought not to be done in the care and treatment of the sick. There is a proposal now to found an ayurvedic college and laboratory at Shoranur, near our village. When it is accomplished a better state of things is hoped for, as the physicians would be really capable men and reliable, though practising the ayurvedic system, in which the people have faith.

273 Insanitary habits are rare. The Cherumas and other depressed
276 classes drink. Chewing of tobacco and betel is common, but this can hardly be called insanitary.

* This remark does not apply to real students and practitioners of the indigenous system of medicine, but only to the unworthy representatives of the science in the village. There is high official and non-official testimony to the real worth of ayurveda as it *ought* to be practised, and as it is practised by many learned persons all over the country.